FIND THE RIGHT PROGRAM FOR YOU PLUS TIPS ON HOW TO PAY FOR IT

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» High School
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When you're in elementary school, summer vacation is all about playing games. During high school, summer break is a time to up your game. This is your chance for experiences that will you make a stronger college applicant and a better college student.

We asked some experts for their advice on how to find the summer experience that's right for you.

**KAREN KANE, Director, Scholarships and Communications, National Society of High School Scholars**

“The opportunities for taking advantage of summer vary widely, including travel, studying, working and volunteering. The main question is how to find the right thing.”

“More than anything, students should look for opportunities that align with their interests, not just things that they think are going to look good on a college application or that sound impressive. Part of what students are doing at this age is unraveling their identity.”

“You don’t find your passion. You create it out of the experiences that you have over time.”

“One of the best resources is Main Street in your hometown. Rely on your network and your parents’ network. You can create your own internship or volunteer opportunity by offering to help a relative or a neighbor or a local business. It doesn’t have to be all summer. It can be a one- or two-week stint or once a week for a month.”

“Guidance counseling offices usually have resources for summer jobs and volunteering.”

“Studying abroad is another option. Fewer than 10% of students in the U.S. ever do it, so international travel will give you an experience that is different from other students who may be competing for the same scholarship or the same spot at a school.”

“One of the biggest side effects of travel and studying abroad is the soft skills that you will gain. Being pushed out of your comfort zone will build your ability to adapt, problem solve and be self-reliant.”

“Another good way to spend part of a summer is to visit colleges. It’s just as useful to understand what you don’t want as it is to understand what you do.”

“You don’t have to spend all of your summer focusing on the college application process but getting your head in that space will help later on.”

**BILL HOLINGER, Director, Harvard Secondary School Program**

“An academic summer is not a summer for every teenage student, but any student who’s interested enough in school to have good grades and a good track record will find some surprising things in an academic program.”

“At Harvard we offer more than 200 college courses in the summer, covering many subjects you won’t run into in high school. You might come and take physics or biology instead of taking it at your high school, but you might want to try marine biology or a literature course that you won’t find at your high school.”

“I’ve heard from a lot of students and a lot of parents who say that that their freshman year at college they knew the ropes because they’d spent a summer in a college program. They have a much easier time finding their way around campus and finding resources. I’ve also heard parents say very happily that their child learned how to do laundry at Harvard in the summer. That’s not the main thrust of the program obviously, but it’s a good life skill.”
“Choosing among the many programs starts with location and the reputation of the school. You’ll find a lot of information on program websites. Some are academically more challenging than others and some offer a particular specialty in terms of courses. MIT has a different bunch of courses available in the summer than Harvard, for example.”

“Don’t hesitate to call the programs and talk to somebody there. We do a lot of academic advising of our incoming students before they ever get here. We encourage them to call us and talk about their interests. We can help steer students toward courses that they’ll like and they’ll be successful in.”

“A transcript with a couple of good university grades on it adds an impressive piece to your application, no matter what college you’re applying to.”

TEKEDRA PIERRE, Internship Coordinator, The Village School, Houston

“Internships give a teenager the opportunity to explore career options. It keeps your mind stimulated and lets you work on the interpersonal skills that are needed once you graduate.”

“If a college is making a decision between a student who's done an internship and one who has not, and all of the other things line up, the student who's done an internship is more likely to get chosen because they took the opportunity to go above and beyond and develop themselves professionally.”

“Sometimes an internship is an opportunity for a student to realize that a career path is not quite what they thought it was, and they may decide to go in a different direction. So, for example, a student getting into a medical-based internship, and they know they want to be a doctor. Then they get into the internship and realize that they don’t like the sight of blood or they don’t enjoy direct patient contact.”

“How do you find an internship? I would say go and ask. Go to the company and say, ‘Hey, I’m interested in this career field. Can I shadow you for a day and maybe find a way I can help you?’”

“A good internship gives you a skill set of being able to work independently, work with others and be speak in front of a group. Those are great skills for students in high school to learn and to practice.”

WHERE ADVENTURE BEGINS.

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